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NOAA FISHERIES PRAISES SIGNING OF SNAKE RIVER SALMON AGREEMENT ***Local, State, Tribal Cooperative Pact Touted as 'Major Contribution'*** ***to Salmon Recovery***

Calling it a "significant step" in salmon recovery, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service today expressed its support for Idaho's agreement with the Nez Perce Tribe to settle water rights claims in the Snake River Basin. NOAA is an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

"Salmon recovery took another significant step forward today," said Bob Lohn, Northwest regional administrator for NOAA Fisheries. "Impressive, and in some cases record, numbers of Snake River Chinook salmon and steelhead are returning and today's commitment to conservation and habitat improvement will help ensure that more continue to return. While this issue may have taken many years to settle, the agreement now in place will ensure that the benefits of increased salmon returns are realized for many years to come."

"I congratulate Governor Kempthorne, the Nez Perce Tribe, the Idaho congressional delegation, the Idaho legislature and numerous other stakeholders who worked diligently and cooperatively to achieve an agreement that will greatly help recover salmon and protect Idaho's economic interests. I look forward to working with the Governor and other Idaho interests to help finalize these plans to ensure salmon and steelhead are protected for generations to come, and to a point where they no longer need to be listed under the Endangered Species Act."

The agreement includes significant long-term benefits for Endangered Species Act-listed salmon and steelhead, while also providing certainty for important forest, irrigation, and other important economic activities. It provides for the development of conservation plans and creation of a \$38 million fund to improve and protect salmon habitat in the Salmon and Clearwater basins. It also includes partnerships with the Tribe on fish hatchery management at the Kooskia and Dworshak National Fish Hatcheries.

This achievement is a key component of NOAA Fisheries' broader goal of receiving completed salmon recovery plans for all areas of the Pacific Northwest by the end of 2005 and finalizing them by 2006. Earlier this year, the Northwest Power and Conservation Council approved subbasin plans that include identification of ESA-listed salmon needs in the Boise, Payette, Weiser, Clearwater, and upper and lower middle, and Hells Canyon Snake River subbasins. Parts of these plans will be utilized by NOAA to develop broader-scale salmon recovery plans for the entire Snake River Basin in the near future.

NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources.

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NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>.

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